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Housekeepers' Chats Friday, Dec. 9.

(NOT FOR PUBLICATION)

Subject: "Christmas Trees and Christmas Greens." Information on Christmas trees from Forest Service. Menu and recipes from Bureau of Home Economics, U.S. Department of Agriculture.

--ooOoo--

The spirit of Christmas is already pervading our house. Even Uncle Ebenezer brings home queer-shaped packages, and hides them in the most unlikely places. I opened the door of the cleaning closet yesterday, and a green parchment lampshade fell on my head. I found a pair of roller skates, under the davenport. In the top drawer of the secretary there's a package that I don't dare open, because I've been warned not to. I hope it is an electric toaster.

Funny thing about Uncle Ebenezer. He grumbles and groans, about the "commercialization of Christmas," and swears he won't have a thing to do with the holiday. But along in December, when he can tune in on "Holy Night," and "Little Town of Bethlehem," Uncle Ebenezer becomes less cynical. In a few days he will be inquiring about the Christmas tree. "You know, Aunt Sammy," he will say, "it won't seem like Christmas, without a tree, for Billy."

Of course I know that -- I also know that it won't be Christmas without a tree for Uncle Ebenezer -- Old and dignified as he is. So Brother Fred and I will put on our heavy wraps some time soon, and get a Christmas tree, for Billy and Uncle Ebenezer.

I doubt whether there is any other material thing, which contributes so much happiness to the child world, as a gaily-lighted, gift-bedecked Christmas tree.

Each year 6 million trees go into the nation's Christmas tree harvest. Six million Christmas trees, cut each year! It sounds like a mighty forest--but is it? Let me explain. The Forest Service estimates that this number of trees could be grown on 5,000 acres of land. In a single year, the lumber industry cuts more than a thousand times this acreage.

We hear a great deal about the conservation of our trees. Do you know what conservation means? Conservation means wise use. And I can think of no better use for trees, than to bring joy to millions of children, at Christmas time. The custom is so old, so well grounded, and so venerated, that to many of us, a Christmas tree is one of the forest's greatest contributions.

The main consideration is how the Christmas tree supply is secured. You and I, and other women, should keep a sharp eye as to where our Christmas trees come from. If we buy a tree, let's make sure that it comes from a legitimate source -- a commercial grower of Christmas trees, or one who has cut it from his

own land. It is said that the automobile has increased forest pilfering. Certainly we do not want to buy a tree which has been stolen.

Whether the tree comes from our own farm woodlot, or from another's, it ought to be cut properly; that is, the matter of thinning should be taken into account. The best and soundest trees should be left to grow to useful timber size, and only the weak, or over-crowded trees, should be taken. These weakling trees may not be the best-shaped, but there is no reason why we should insist on the very best trees in the forest, as a sacrifice to the Christmas spirit. As a matter of fact, a one-sided tree fits better in the corner, than a tree with a more perfect shape.

There is a pleasing custom coming into greater and greater vogue each year in this country. Those who follow this custom do not cut their Christmas trees, but dig them, root and all, or get them from a nursery, and plant them in the house, until the Christmas festival is over. Then the tree is carefully planted in the lawn or garden, and in a few years there is a steplike succession of Christmas trees, each one a living and beautiful reminder of happy, by-gone Christmas days. One family I know has followed this custom for six years, ever since the oldest child was three years old. The "Christmas tree row" on their lawn commemorates six joyful Yuletides. Of course this custom is not practicable for the "cliff dwellers" of large cities, who haven't enough room to grow even a sprig of parsley.

The custom of having a municipal Christmas tree has been adopted by several cities in the West -- notably in Denver. In many cases, the municipal Christmas tree supplants the individual Christmas tree in the homes. Usually the trees are placed in the town square, and electrically lighted.

Now we'll make a sudden transition from Christmas trees to Baked Beans and Codfish Balls. Do you know that Baked Beans are one of the traditional meals of the Maine lumberjacks, as well as the Back Bay Bostonians? I fancy that many a Bostonian will relish a hearty meal of Baked Beans and Codfish Balls, following an expedition after a shapely spruce tree.

Besides Baked Beans and Codfish Balls, we'll have Stewed Tomatoes and Celery, Brown Bread, and Fruit Cup. Tomatoes and celery, stewed together, provide a good means of using up the outer stalks of celery, which are not attractive enough to be served raw.

Let's see -- what else did I have to suggest? Something about the Brown Bread. I remember -- make enough Brown Bread so that the children can have it in sandwiches the next day. In your Fruit Cup, use a combination of fresh fruit, and canned or stewed dried fruits. A few Malaga grapes, cut in half, with the seeds removed, are very nice in Fruit Cup.

Now let's go back to the beginning, and get the Boston Baked Beans off our mind. If you have a Radio Cookbook, well and good; you need not copy this recipe. If you do not have a Radio Cookbook, you may write the recipe for Baked Beans, cooked in the good old Boston Way. Six ingredients, for Boston Baked Beans:

2 cups dried beans.
½ pound salt pork.
4 tablespoons molasses.
1 teaspoon mustard, if desired.
1½ teaspoons salt (depending on the saltiness of the pork), and
Onion, if desired.

Check the six ingredients, while I repeat them: (Repeat)

Soak the beans overnight, in cold water. Then cook them gently, until they are soft, but not mushy. Score the rind of the salt pork, and put half of the pork in the bottom of the bean pot. Add the par-boiled beans. Mix the molasses, and other seasonings, with a little hot water, and pour over the beans. Add just enough more water to cover. Place the rest of the salt pork on top, cover the pot, and cook the beans very slowly, in the oven, for 6 or 7 hours. Add a little hot water, from time to time, to replace that which cooks away and is absorbed by the beans. Keep the lid on the bean pot until the last hour of cooking. Then uncover, and allow the beans, and the pork on the top, to brown.

Shall I tell you how to make Codfish Balls? It's very easy. Three ingredients for Codfish Balls:

1½ cups (packed) salt codfish, shredded.
3 cups mashed potatoes, seasoned with milk and butter, and
2 eggs.

Only three ingredients, but I'd better repeat them: (Repeat)

Shred the fish, soak in the cold water until freshened, and cook until tender. Place the fish in a double layer of cheesecloth, and press out all the liquid. Mix the cooked codfish, with the hot mashed potatoes, and the well beaten eggs. Beat until light. Drop by spoonfuls into hot fat, and fry to a golden brown. Drain on paper, and serve as soon as possible.

The menu again: Baked Beans; Codfish Balls; Stewed Tomatoes and Celery; Brown Bread; and Fruit Cup.

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